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United for Quality Care

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West Hartford
SEIU District 1199 New England
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the committee. My name is Shomit Sengupta, I live in West Hartford and have worked as a home care worker for four years. I come before you today to ask that you increase funding for home care services so that PCAs like me can be provided the wages and benefits we deserve.

I currently provide services for three gentlemen: One client through DSS, and two others through a home care agency. My responsibilities include helping my clients change clothes, taking them on walks, guiding them with exercise, reminding them to take their medicine, and doing work around the house. By this I mean retrieving the mail, chopping fruits and vegetables, washing dishes, wiping down furniture, wiping down the toilet and bathroom sink, folding laundry, mopping or vacuuming floors, taking out the trash, changing out soiled towels, emptying urine bottles, etc. I had previously helped one of my clients with schoolwork when he was a student at Tunxis. I took notes for him, reminded him to do his reading assignments, and helped him write his papers.

The pay for all this work? \$16.25 per hour. The agencies pay even less. Unlike a lot of homecare workers, I am fortunate to have parents who are still alive. I am fortunate to not have children or a family to provide for. I am fortunate to be in relatively good health. But I worry about my future. I wonder if I will ever feel secure enough to get married and have kids. I wonder if I will ever be able to retire. I haven't had a vacation in years. And I haven't seen some of my relatives in more than a decade. I can't afford to buy a new car, so instead I spend money on the bare minimum of maintenance and repairs necessary to keep this one running. But it's not cheap.

An economic commentator once said, "As new "innovative" industries pop up, workers are finding fewer and fewer jobs that will even classify them as employees. If you're a gig economy worker, you're racking up miles on your own car driving absurd hours to make pennies and the company does not provide you with any benefits because you're not an employee. Then, when your car breaks down, and you have to spend all the money you made to get it fixed; where does that leave you?"

Even though he speaks of companies like Lyft and Uber, I quote him because his observation hits very close to home. One of my responsibilities is taking clients out to restaurants, grocery stores, medical appointments, and even concerts, festivals, and other such events. I have driven as far as Toad's Place and Pacific Standard Tavern in New Haven (an 80-mile round trip), Holyoke Mall (a 94-mile round trip), and Mohegan Sun (a 120-mile round trip). I mention this because we get absolutely no mileage reimbursement whatsoever. Not one penny!

In 2020 I drove my clients a combined total of 1579.5 miles. Using the 2020 IRS Standard Mileage Rate of 57.5 cents per mile, that works out to \$908.21. This year so far (as of March 1, 2021), I have driven my clients 473.3 miles. In addition to the gas and vehicle maintenance, when we go to restaurants, concerts, and festivals, I have to pay for tickets, food, and parking, out of my own pockets.

My car has also been vomited in, urinated in, and defecated in. When I attempted to get some compensation from Allied, I was basically told that it's not their problem.

The fact that we are paid \$16.25 while being called "Heroes" and "Essential Workers" is shameful. The fact that we are forced to drive around our clients for 1579.5 miles with no reimbursement whatsoever for gas and vehicle maintenance is unethical. I ask you to please do what is needed to put an end to this kind of exploitation. We deserve better.

Thank you for your time.